

DA COSTA (J. M.)

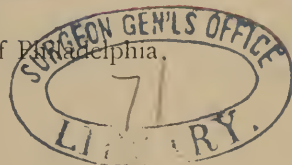
## Speech

Delivered by Dr. J. M. Da Costa,

At the dinner given to

Prof. Alfred Stillé, by the Medical Profession of Philadelphia.

Thursday, June 5th, 1884.



In rising to propose the health of the guest of the evening, I do so with mingled feelings. Joined to the pleasure of the duty, is the sad reflection that the master to whom common consent had assigned the agreeable task, has gone from among us, and that on another has devolved the expression of the kindly sentiments which have brought us here. Most fitting, too, would it have been that he should have presided to night; for a great man befits a great occasion.

In truth, it is a great occasion which calls us together. When at the end of a long and distinguished career, those who have labored with or alongside of a man; who have been his pupils, his associates, his colleagues; have striven for the same offices, have vied with him in generous rivalry, voluntarily meet to testify their friendship and to mark their approbation of his life, it is, indeed, a memorable event, not only to him, but to his calling. And we are giving all that we have to give. We cannot bestow on you an order of merit, such as a government in some countries might bestow. No ribbon of the Bath, no ensign of the Legion of Honor, no Iron Cross can be placed on your breast. Nor can we crown you with a civic crown, with its appropriate inscription *ob cives serratos*. Yet your crown of triple oak, accorded to you now by the representatives of

your own profession, for a life of valuable services, will be no less a mark of pre-eminence, because it will have to rest invisibly on your brow.

It is difficult, in your presence, to speak of the title you have to this and other distinctions without appearing to violate the canons of good taste. But you must look upon yourself as being with us on an occasion in which your claims are being summed up at the bar of American medicine—claims not alone for to-day, but for posterity; and in which the advocate may plead the more earnestly, because he feels the consciousness of an assured verdict.

Dr. Stillé has been distinguished in various capacities—as author, as professor, as worker for the common good of the profession.

Stillé, the author, has produced works, the learning and style of which, are ornaments to American literature, and in whose pages discriminating judgment is as conspicuous as grace of language. The great treatise on Therapeutics and *Materia Medica*, has been described by a foreign journal as a work on medicine of a kind rarely seen, so ponderous in its dimensions, so fascinating in its contents.

Stillé, the professor, has been remarkable for the fulness and accuracy of his discourses; the eloquent denunciation of new names given to old things; the conscientious attempt to keep abreast of the times in an ever-widening subject; the admirable exposition of the matter; the clear, sonorous delivery. In the occupancy, for twenty years, by this scholarly physician, it is certain that a great chair—the chair of Rush, of Chapman, of Wood, of Pepper—has lost nothing of its fame.

As a worker for the common good of the profession, the efforts in the cause of medical education, the active interest in societies, recognized by having been chosen to the position of President of the County Medical Society, of the Pathological Society, of the American Medical Association, and, recently, of the College of Physicians, are conspicuous. It is not the least of his claims that he was very prominent, none more so, among the founders of the body

which has done so much to bring the medical profession into unison,—the American Medical Association. Nor must the generous giving of the bulk of his large library to the ancient University with which his name is indissolubly connected, remain unmentioned among his public-spirited acts. Many an aspiring student will become a lover of literature and of science through the thoughtful gift of this lover of books.

But, sir, it is not the author, the teacher, the worker for public objects only, whom we hold dear. If your titles were these alone, however much we might respect them, we should scarcely be here to honor you to-night. Better than *Stillé* the author, better than *Stillé* the teacher, better than all, is *Stillé* the man. No meretricious schemes to make gold jingle in soulless pockets attach to your name. A life of probity, a high sense of honor, uniform courtesy, have endeared you to us.

Such, then, are some of the titles to recognized distinction, in and out of American Medicine, which we gladly claim for you. That Medicine is now making for itself a more and more individual position. In every country there are those who are born old, and remain with eyes turned back to the past. Knowledge has no charms for them unless she is in wrinkles, and her joints creak, and her utterances are wheezy. There are those who stay as children, restless, full of enthusiasm, stumbling over every thing, and eager for every change. Our national character furnishes but few of the former; and the traits of the latter are very greatly modified by what, besides quick perception of the useful, is a peculiarity of American Medicine, its thoroughly cosmopolitan nature. With the exception, perhaps, of one country, medicine is here more cosmopolitan than anywhere. And there is a growing love of original research, an increasing appreciation of pure literary work—as shown in the enthusiastic reception of the wonderful volumes in which brigades of folios, divisions of octavos, and army corps of pamphlets, are being placed into line under the direction of a marshall who is with us to night,—which bespeak a bright and most active future.

But it must be confessed, that, as yet, some of this love of work, with the desire to instruct which comes with it, takes doubtful means of expression. For the advancement of the profession, it does not seem absolutely necessary that wherever a railroad opens a new country, and a prosperous little town attracts eight doctors, there should be at once two medical schools. Nor is it clear, why the establishment of every post office should quickly be followed by a fresh medical journal. And in these journals it is a little trying to him who endeavors to keep himself informed of the literature of the day, to find in six out of ten, articles to prove that opium will make you sleep, and is dangerous if too much be taken: that castor oil has purgative properties, and is not relished, especially by children; that it is difficult to prescribe for malarial diseases without using quinine; and that aloes is bitter and may gripe very unpleasantly. One might pardon some neglect in these lively authors to let their overflowing plethora of knowledge run off into the common stream.

Yet these are, after all, but temporary drawbacks in that great development which we all of us see so clearly, and hail with so much pleasure.

Honored guest: Be it in connection with the Medicine of our country, or, better, as a summary of your whole career, it seems not inappropriate to apply to you the words of Cicero: "*Omnia summa consecutus es, virtute duce, comite fortuna.*" If you have attained the highest rank, with virtue leading the way and fortune attending, it will so remain to the end. During the many years of vigorous life which we fervently hope are still before you; wherever you elect to pass these years, whether in the seclusion of your home and in lettered ease, or in visiting the scenes of former travel and early studies; in whatever clime; whatever skies may cover and sun shine on your path,—with you will be the affectionate regards of those who surround you to-night, and of the far larger body of which we are only the temporary representatives: and you may know and feel that hundreds are joining now, and will always join us, in the wish: 'Health and long life to Professor Alfred Stillé.'